



STATE OF MARYLAND

DHMH PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

DHMH Reminds Residents How To Prevent Gastrointestinal Illness

Baltimore, MD (February 24, 2012) --There has been a rise in the number of viral gastroenteritis outbreaks reported to the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) over the past several weeks. Gastroenteritis is inflammation of the stomach and intestines, and its most common symptoms are diarrhea, vomiting, and stomach pain. Norovirus is the most common cause of acute gastroenteritis in the United States and has been the infectious agent most commonly identified in these outbreaks by the DHMH Laboratories Administration. People commonly refer to this illness as the “stomach flu,” but it is not caused by influenza.

Norovirus, which used to be called “Norwalk-like virus,” causes a clinical syndrome that can include vomiting, diarrhea, stomach pain, low fever, headache, muscle aches, chills, and fatigue. Although it is often seen among those in schools, childcare centers, nursing homes and assisted living facilities, it can affect people of all ages and in all settings. Norovirus activity varies from year to year. To date, the overall number of outbreaks is comparable to other years; however, now is its peak season. By knowing of its presence, Maryland residents can better protect themselves.

“Simple precautions like hand washing can help you avoid infection,” said Frances B. Phillips, DHMH Deputy Secretary for Public Health Services. “If you do get sick, we encourage you to stay home until you are better.”

Norovirus is present in the stool or vomit of infected persons and is easily spread to other people by contact with an infected person or by eating or drinking contaminated food or water. Symptoms usually begin 12-48 hours after exposure.

To prevent norovirus and other viral gastroenteritis infections:

- Wash hands frequently, especially after using the toilet, changing diapers, or having contact with diarrhea, vomit, or potentially contaminated surfaces and before eating or handling food or drink.
- Help young children to wash their hands.
- Thoroughly clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces immediately after an episode of illness by using a bleach-based household cleaner.

Norovirus gastroenteritis usually lasts 24-48 hours and goes away. If you become ill:

- Stay hydrated by continuing to drink enough fluids.
- Stay home if you are sick. By staying home, you can help prevent infecting others. Food handlers, health care workers/child care workers, and children in child care who have illness consistent with norovirus infection should not work or attend child care until at least 48 hours after their symptoms have gone away. In some cases, the local health department may require longer exclusions.
- See your doctor if you have severe illness. In some situations, people may need to receive intravenous fluids.
- Antibiotics do not treat norovirus infection and will not help symptoms.

More information is available from DHMH [here](#) or at CDC's website [here](#).

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